

Supernatural Beliefs

213

not follow from the source specified. This could be expected to result, through the operation of the principle of extinction,¹¹ in a weakening of the habit of heeding this particular warning and in a functional discrimination between realistic and unrealistic dangers.¹² The fact that these unrealistic warnings are sanctioned by the community normally prevents such an event from occurring. Pupils are punished for not heeding warnings about *marsalai*, ghosts, sorcery, or blood, as is illustrated by the following case. Kwiya and Fit each bought a harmonica from me and began playing it around their house. Their mother warned them that this would bring ghosts. Neither of them heeded this warning, so the mother took matters in her own hands. She scolded them both severely and forced them to return their harmonicas to me. An even more striking case, perhaps, occurred when Mundik,¹³ a youth who had not yet received his keloids of manhood, attended a funeral ceremony, thus ignoring the warning about the danger from the *marsalai* of the cult to those who are not yet initiated. Mundik was attacked and beaten by the members of the cult, and, after being tied hand and foot, was thrown into a near-by dwelling. Had it not been for our presence he might well have been killed.

Since social sanctions are, in the last analysis, responsible for the maintenance of supernatural beliefs, an inquiry might profitably be made into the problem of why parents take the time and effort to force children to heed warnings. It may indeed be asked why they even issue these unrealistic warnings. A detailed answer to the above questions is beyond the scope of this chapter, but a few suggestions can be made. In the first place, since the teachers have been brought up in Kwoma culture they do not distinguish between realistic and unrealistic dangers as such. Hence they believe that if a

¹¹ See chap. vii, p. 192, n. 30.

¹² If a response to a generalized cue does not achieve a reward, but the response to the original cue continues to do so, the organism learns to discriminate between the two cues and to react only to the one which leads to reward. See E. R. Hilgard and D. G. Marquis, *Conditioning and Learning* (New York, 1940), chap. viii.

¹³ Mundik was a Yelagu who was staying with relatives at Kwoma.